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Pratt PCB Cleanup Could Cost \$10 Million

By CHRISTOPHER KEATING
The Hartford Courant

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EAST HARTFORD - Pratt & Whitney could be forced to spend as much as \$10 million to clean a local pond and brook that are contaminated with highly toxic PCBs, officials said.

The PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, are in concentrations as much as 40 to 60 times higher than allowed by law, said Lori Saliby, a PCB specialist for the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The contamination on the western edge of the company's 1,100-acre campus abuts a residential neighborhood, but the contamination has not spread beyond Pratt's property, officials said.

Despite the heavy concentrations near a residential neighborhood north of Willow Street, neighbors have no immediate need for concern, Saliby said. PCBs are known to cause cancer in animals and are suspected of causing cancer in humans.

"You have to ingest them or touch them or breathe them," she said. "The water isn't going to carry the PCBs away. It would be of much more concern if it was traveling off site."

Gloria J. McAdam, whose backyard overlooks the site, said she has lived next to Willow Brook for about 12 years but was unaware of the contamination until this year.

"I wish I'd known about it sooner, but I'm glad they're cleaning it up," said McAdam, who serves as president of Windsor-based Foodshare. "It's all fenced. It's not like your kids can get to it. [But], I think everybody in the neighborhood has to be concerned about property values."

"We're going to clean it up," said Mark Sullivan, a Pratt spokesman. "We're going to drain it, scoop up the

"When the kids were little, somebody was always coming back in [to the house] with black grease and oil," she said, adding that she remembers going into her backyard when it "smelled like a flooded oil burner."

Environmental officials said there is no evidence that the contamination has spread to the two most high-profile sites on the property - the University of Connecticut's new football stadium and the 700-acre Rentschler Field site that is expected to be the new home for offices, light manufacturing and research and development space over the next 15 years.

Pratt officials said they no longer use the chemicals as lubricants for machinery and in electric transformers. The PCBs apparently flowed directly into the water in the days before the substance was banned in 1979.

"Everybody used them," said Sullivan. "Up until the 1960s, the floor drained directly into the pond. We closed off those floor drains about 40 years ago."

The PCBs stretch across a 4-acre area that includes Willow Brook Pond - a manmade pond that was constructed by Pratt. Willow Brook flows west, across Main Street, and eventually into the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound. The nearest residential neighborhood is along Risley Street, which is in an area elevated above the pond. The area is bounded by Main Street on the west and Willow Street on the south.

"We're very confident that those houses are fine," said Gary Minor, Pratt's vice president for public affairs. "We fenced it off. We've done everything the DEP has asked us to."

When houses have been sold on Risley Street, Pratt has provided the new homeowners with letters "indicating there is no contamination" on their property, Minor said.

PCBs, by nature, generally remain in the sediment and do not get flushed away with the water, officials said.

Cori Rose, a project manager who is handling the permit process for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said the contamination was discovered by Pratt during routine maintenance more than three years ago, but the discovery did not come to the attention of the corps until several months ago. A decision on the permit, she said, will be made in the next few months.

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